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The K.G.B. Under Andropov: Pervasive Force in Soviet

By RICHARD BERNSTEIN

During the years that it was headed by Yuri V. Andropov, the new leader of the Soviet Communist Party, the K.G.B. consolidated its internal-security role and remained one of the most pervasive and feared institutions in Soviet society.

The 15-year tenure of Mr. Andropov was not marked by the mass terror of much of the Stalinist era. But under him, the institution expanded its functions and became a more sophisticated and effective means of enforcing near absolute political control.

The initials K.G.B. stand for the Russian words meaning Committee for State Security, and the organization is charged with protecting the Soviet regime from its real or imagined enemies abroad as well as at home.

The K.G.B., which has had different names in the past, is a peculiarly Russian institution that sprang directly from the Okhrana, the secret police of the czars, and has been at the center of power in the Soviet Union since the Bolshevik Revolution. Stalin used it to arrest, try and sentence millions of people — including many Old Bolsheviks whom he wanted to purge from the party — to death or prison camps in the 1930's.

Khrushchev Tried to Impose Curbs

After Stalin's death in 1953, Nikita S. Khrushchev tried to eliminate terror as an instrument of the state and to require the security police to abide by more legal procedures. Lavrenti P. Beria, the head of the N.K.V.D., as the agency was known at the time, was executed at the end of 1953 in a power struggle, and the vast network of forced labor camps set up under Stalin was partly dismantled. In a celebrated secret speech to the Central Committee of the party in 1956, Mr. Khrushchev denounced Stalin and many of his methods.

Mr. Khrushchev went too far for conservative party bureaucrats who respected Stalin's methods, according to experts on the Soviet Union, yet not far enough for those who favored change. After Mr. Khrushchev was deposed in 1964, the K.G.B. began to regain some of its stature, if not its power to decree the fate of millions of Soviet citizens uncontrolled. Mr. Andropov, who had been a party official in charge of monitoring relations with foreign Communist parties, was called to head the K.G.B. in 1967.

"He balanced very cleverly, avoiding the excesses of mass terror on the one hand and, on the other, effectively suppressing dissent," said Prof. Adam B. Ulam, director of the Russian Research Center at Harvard. "Mass terror was discarded, but political repression continued."

Informers, Prisons and Hospitals

The K.G.B. exists now as a huge, intrusive bureaucracy with an elaborate network of staff officers, informers, means of technological surveillance, prisons and psychiatric hospitals that operate swiftly and effectively against virtually any Soviet citizens who depart from Communist Party orthodoxy. In the Stalinist 1930's, the number of labor camp prisoners was estimated at 12 million; the number of political prisoners now is probably in the tens of thousands.

Soviet citizens and émigrés have reported that interrogations by the K.G.B. now tend to be more correct and that violence is less common than in Stalinist days. The K.G.B. also more often than not provides a legal reason, or at least the appearance of a legal reason, for an arrest or interrogation.

But it was under Mr. Andropov that the K.G.B. crushed virtually the entire dissident movement. It jailed, for example, the vast majority of the members of the so-called Helsinki Monitoring Group, established in 1976 to monitor Soviet practices in human rights.

More recently, the K.G.B. has harassed out of existence the founders of a citizens' committee in Moscow that opposed the arms race. It jailed at least one of its members, called others in for frequent interrogations and confined its founder to a psychiatric hospital.

Industrial Espionage

It also took charge of industrial and technical espionage and, according to some reports, of training foreign terrorist organizations. Unlike Western police forces, the K.G.B. is also in charge of Soviet intelligence operations abroad and is responsible for Soviet border defense.

How far the Soviet Union has come since the Stalin era — and how far the distance yet to go — can be seen in the current treatment of Andrei D. Sakharov, the dissident Soviet physicist. Dr. Sakharov, a member of the Soviet Academy of Sciences and a man three times decorated with his country's highest civilian award for his work on the hydrogen bomb in the early 1950's, became an outspoken and internationally known advocate of human rights in the 1960's and 70's.

In January 1980, K.G.B. men abducted him from his car, bundled him aboard a plane and exiled him to an apartment in the city of Gorky, 250 miles east of Moscow, where no foreigners can visit him. His notes and manuscripts have been taken, and he has been both physically and verbally harassed, all without any legal basis for his exile ever having been given. He was not charged with a crime or imprisoned, and it is likely that somebody as openly critical of the authorities as Dr. Sakharov would simply have been murdered in Stalin's era.

Few Soviet citizens dare to criticize or challenge the K.G.B. as openly as Dr. Sakharov does. The agency's headquarters, a huge stone prison in Dzerzhinsky Square in Moscow, has a name, the Lyubyanka, whose mention is enough to strike fear in any Soviet citizen's heart.

To combat this dread impression, the Soviet authorities have mounted a propaganda effort in recent years, including two movies lionizing "Chekisty," as K.G.B. agents are still known, after one of the older acronyms for the organization created to protect the Soviet regime when it was young, insecure and vulnerable.

But the effectiveness of the organization in domestic security lies to some extent in the climate of intense distrust — euphemistically called "watchfulness" — that governs the Soviet state's relations with its citizens and their relations among themselves. Soviet schoolchildren are still encouraged to honor Pavel Morozov, a 13-year-old boy who in 1932 turned his own father in to the authorities for harboring landlords during the collectivization campaign of that year and was killed in vengeance by villagers.

Many Soviet citizens simply assume that their telephone conversations are monitored and their homes bugged. The K.G.B. monitors Soviet airwaves. In one case, a Russian amateur radio operator said that he was allowed only to discuss his equipment on the air and that if other subjects came up in his broadcasts, agents would drive up to his home within a half an hour.

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